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# THE BIBLICAL WORLD

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## *The Old and New Testament Student*

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FROM more than one quarter come reports which make it altogether probable that reform in our Sunday-school instruction is only a matter of time. Just what direction that reform will take it is difficult to prophesy, but no question is certainly more vital than that of the adjustment of instruction to pupils of different ages and capacities. In the ordinary Sunday school such adjustment is attempted by means of different sorts of lesson helps — Primary, Intermediate, Senior, Advanced — and it is natural to feel that the variety of demands made by the different groups of pupils are met by such a device. But in many cases, to say the least, the efficiency of these publications diminishes in proportion as they are intended for older pupils, and most of them fall decidedly short of furnishing the sort of instruction or method which is adapted to adults.

In many particulars the character of the instruction intended for Infant Departments and classes of young children is better adapted to its purpose. Child-study is especially prominent in pedagogical circles, and kindergarten methods have become so popularized as to have been introduced pretty generally into our Sunday schools. The requirements and capacities of the child have been to some degree considered in the adoption of methods for conducting children's departments of the Sunday school (to omit for the

moment the subject-matter of the lesson), and our criticism does not concern such instruction. For while there is here still great room for improvement in the choice of the lesson itself, and there is real danger that pupils may be unconsciously taught that true religion consists in marches and a general good time, such methods are probably more scientific and intelligent than those which concern the instruction of the adolescent and mature members of the school.

At the worst, the teacher of the infant department has a method, if not information for a guide, while other teachers in the same school are likely to regard their duty as having been fulfilled when half an hour has been filled with asking questions printed upon a lesson sheet. Were these questions always such as are calculated to inspire interest in either teacher or pupils, the case would be more hopeful, but too often they are perfunctory and inane. The high-school pupil loses his respect for the Bible and religion when the same person who teaches him with an evident mastery of his subject during the week undertakes a similar service on Sunday with the aid of cut-and-dried questions which answer themselves. The wider one's knowledge of the average Sunday-school instruction, the more convinced will one be that modern pedagogy has not been allowed to furnish much help in the conduct of Sunday-school classes composed of young men and women.

Too often is the case of the adult classes worse. Many schools believe grown men and women are no longer in need of instruction in the Bible, and therefore do not attempt to organize classes for their benefit. Often when such classes are formed, their members, men and women who think independently and resultfully upon subjects which they confess are of far less importance than the Bible, are content to answer questions which, excepting those involving some theology or philosophy, could be answered as well by their children or grandchildren. Indeed, the chief

*THE CASE OF  
OLDER PUPILS*

*THE CASE OF  
ADULT CLASSES*

difference between the instruction given those children and the material printed for the adult classes seems often to lie in the character of the pictures with which each lesson is enforced or illustrated. The topic and method of teaching are the same.

And here one confronts a fundamental evil in Sunday-school instruction: uniformity in subject and method. So far from seriously recognizing the principle which in other schools is axiomatic, that the subject-matter and method of instruction must be adapted to the age and capacity of the pupil, Sunday schools are congratulating themselves that persons of all ages in all countries are studying the same passage of Scripture. So long as such uniformity exists, so long will the element of instruction in Sunday schools be weakened. Any reform must begin with the underlying difficulty.

And the first step in such reform may very well be the introduction into Sunday schools of the principle of grading which rules in public schools. Pupils should be so grouped that all those of about the same age and acquirements may be taught together, that the lessons and method of teaching be adapted to each group, and also that pupils may pass from one group to another, either by a change of teachers or of methods and lesson, or of both.

In the case of young people the basis of such grading is at hand in that of the public schools. To a certain extent all grading is necessarily arbitrary, but if classes were so arranged that there would be no mixing of pupils of widely different grades in the public schools, they would acquire a unity that would more than compensate for the breaking of family groups or of acquaintance. At the same time the teacher would better understand the limits and the possibilities of the pupil, as well as be aided in finding the indispensable common intellectual ground.

*THE FUNDAMENTAL DIFFICULTY MET BY GRADING PUPILS*

*THE GRADING OF YOUNGER PUPILS*

On the basis of such grading, lessons should be chosen which, both in subject-matter and treatment, would keep the Sunday school working on intellectual lines parallel to those of the common and high schools. It is not enough simply to have questions of increasing difficulty upon the same lesson assigned to the different classes. There are some subjects which the public schools would not teach pupils of different grades. No more should the Sunday school, if it would hope to gain the best results, undertake to teach in different ways the same lesson to infants, half-grown children, young men and women, and adults.

*POSSIBLE LESSONS FOR VARIOUS GRADES OF SCHOOL CHILDREN*

The passage that to the man or woman might be of greatest interest, to the child would be unintelligible, and to a less degree the reverse is true. The child lives in the world of sense. Let him have the incomparable stories in which the Hebrew writers set forth truth. He will see the lesson which the story enforces without any great need of dances and mechanical devices, however much such things may be needed to offset the intellectual bewilderment that a child of six feels in grappling with the burden of Jeremiah or the logic of Paul.

The pupils of the high school live in the stimulating air of history and mathematics, of literature and elementary science—in a world of new facts and new instruction. For them there is the history of the Jews and of the church, the study of scriptural biography in the light of modern research. It is a study, if only it be taught rationally by even a moderately informed teacher, quite as interesting as that of Greece and Rome, and alive with the most practical and vital teaching for the conduct of life. Once let such subjects be taught by methods followed in the public schools to which the members of the Sunday-school class belong, and an end will come to indifference and contempt.

The adult classes present few new difficulties when once the general principle be recognized of adapting the subject-matter and the method of teaching to the pupil. Men and women

are interested in matters that are at once practical and abstract. They are not greatly interested in stories or facts as such; they wish to see always the relation of doctrine to life and of God to man. Such lessons should be chosen as should meet this demand. While a child may be allowed to picture scattered events, or study scattered passages, the member of an adult class soon gets a distaste by such study and leaves the school. Were the lessons more adapted to their wants—studies of entire books, of the modern bearing of scriptural teachings, of special doctrines, of the teachings of different books upon the same subject, of history and biography—we should find men and women everywhere interested in their Bibles, and the adult classes constituting a proper proportion of the school. It is not extemporaneous exhortation, or vague, pious moralizing, or the asking of printed questions that such classes want, but intellectual life as virile and as honest as that in which their members live during the week.

The administration of a school graded on such principles would be ideal only when each department could meet by itself and conduct its instruction along the lines it has discovered most effective. The adult class may occasionally like to share in general exercises that reduce teaching period to a few minutes, but, as a rule, they require more time for discussion than younger classes and care very little for singing and declamations and marches. To reduce their time causes as much difficulty as the lengthening of the teaching period brings to a teacher struggling with a class of uneasy boys. But where it is impossible for each department to meet separately in its own room or rooms, it will still be possible for the essential principle to be observed; the young children, the school children, and the adult classes each having their own lesson topic.

Whether or not pupils should pass up from one teacher to another, or whether teachers should change their methods as their classes grow older, is a question that will probably require

answer according to particular cases. In some instances it is evident that it would be better for the same teacher to keep a class, but, in general, there is much in favor of pupils passing from one grade to another; for not only is there a special sense of advance, but it enables teachers to become competent in handling pupils of each grade. And it is only in effective teaching that the efficiency of any school lies.